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NEW TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS: A SUMMARY

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Introduction

A number of papers each of which explains aspects of the life and background of new secondary school teachers in Papua New Guinea, have been produced as a result of the 1982 New Teachers Survey. This paper will summarise the major points which have been revealed so far. There appears to have been no previous research on new provincial high school teachers in P.N.G., though internationally there is a massive amount of data on new teachers. However it is interesting to note that almost all this research comes from developed countries: a computer search yielded no comparable data from any other developing country. Other research on secondary teachers in P.N.G. which at times complements this research includes work by Flaherty (1981), Guthrie (1983), Kuhlman (1981), Wilson (1981) and Wohlberg (1979). Research by Richardson and Van der Veur (1968) and Smith, Carss and Power (1979) on primary school teachers is also relevant.

Preparatory work for the New Teachers Survey 1982 started in October of that year and is mainly concerned with G.T.C. trained teachers who graduated in November 1982. The aims of the survey

(Palmer 1983a) are to:-

- 1) Investigate the incidence and causes of teacher dissatisfaction, and attempt to relate this to existing attrition data (Kuhlman 1981)
 - 2) Find out what, courses or parts of courses at Goroka Teachers' College (GTC) or the University's main campus seem unsatisfactory when first year teachers look back on their teacher training,
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- 3) Find out teachers' feelings about the system of school postings
 - 4) Find out what guidance is provided for new teachers
 - 5) Ascertain how new teachers view the teaching styles of their more experienced colleagues,
 - 6) Discover whether or not new teachers change their teaching methods during their first year of teaching,
 - 7) Ascertain new teachers' commitment to teaching
 - 8) Find out how well teachers have settled into their schools - i.e. try to understand more about the process of professional socialisation,
 - 9) Find out more about the views of new teachers on the system of inspection,

10) Find a method of correlating the pre grades of the teachers with their on-the-job success.

Some of these aims, which are somewhat ambitious, have been achieved, but there remains much more analysis of the data to complete.

The Trials

It was decided to adapt an existing questionnaire from a UK survey of the late 1960s (Taylor and Dale, 1971), which was trialed with eight new teachers in Eastern Highlands Province. Details of this part of the project were given at a recent GTC Research Seminar (Palmer, 1983). Following the trial and in the light of comments from colleagues, the questionnaire was reduced from 100 to 69 questions, the ratio of open-ended to pre-coded questions was increased, and the language of the questionnaire was simplified.

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Trials carried out on such a small sample give little statistically valid evidence, but they did indicate that new teachers possessed a considerable degree of idealism, though perhaps less than described by Wohlberg (1979). It also indicated a measure of the “restlessness” or unsettled career patterns described by previous research amongst primary school teachers (Richardson & Van de Veur, 1968), (Smith, Carss & Power 1979). After the trials a full survey was carried out between June 1953 and January 1984 which was answered by 77 out of a possible 132 new teachers (58.3%).

The Social Background of New Teachers

The present research (Palmer, 1985b) was compared with previous work by Weeks (1976), and the results were in general terms similar with regard to the home background of students.

- 1) 71% of the sample were male (29% female) which is similar to the percentages male and female the college as a whole.
- 2) The largest proportions of females in the sample came from the islands and coastal areas.
- 3) Highlands teachers formed just over half the sample and these teachers were predominantly male.
- 4) There were few male highlands teachers whose fathers had received any education.
- 5) The fathers of female new teachers tended to be educated.
- 6) Similarly with formal employment, fathers of female new teachers were predominantly in modern sector employment whilst fathers of male new teachers tended to be subsistence farmers.
- 7) The trends for fathers of female teachers to be both educated and employed had strengthened considerably

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since Weeks's 1976 Survey. Palmer (1978: 1982) also obtained similar results and explained them thus:-

It is mainly girls from groups set apart by the advantage of income, status and education who make full use of the secondary education facilities available ignoring the more common prejudices against education for girls.

This explanation also seems to be true at present and it is likely that very few girls other than those with educated employed fathers will get places at G.T.C. as standards at G.T.C. increase.

8) Evidence from the survey suggested that ascriptive processes with the extended family were important in the choice of teaching as a career. This was particularly true where females chose teaching. Six out of the seven new teachers whose fathers were also teachers were female. There was also a tendency for teachers to come from families where parents or siblings were teachers and for the spouses or fiancés of teachers also to be teachers.

Choosing Teaching as a Career

The evidence above showed that one factor for students choosing teaching as a career is connected with their family background, particularly for girls. Palmer (1985b) suggested that highlanders (largely male) might see teaching as an attractive career due to the proximity of GTC, the low costs involved and the short period of training. They would also be in a job of higher status than that of their fathers.

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There does however seem to be more to the choice of teaching as a career than this, a very definite correlation was noted between attendance at a mission school and the choice of teaching as a career. The tendency was for a higher proportion of new teachers to have attended mission schools, than would be expected proportionately. Some schools produced quite high numbers of teachers. St Paul's High School, Enga had eight of its ex-students graduating as teachers in 1982. This is what Wohlberg: (1979) calls "the moral imperative to teach". A further interesting point is that those who made the decision to teach early (whilst at provincial high school) are more likely to be positive about remaining in teaching than those who made the decision after failing to follow some other career.

Previous research, Kay (1971), Weeks (1977) and Guthrie (1983) is divided about the commitment of female teachers to staying in teaching. The present survey was not conclusive but indicated that female teachers were in fact simply being practical in not stating that they would stay in teaching a long while, as they realised that their future would probably involve them in roles as wives and mothers.

GTC Courses as Viewed by New Teachers

Palmer (1984) reported back to GTC staff at an early date on the feedback from the survey on GTC courses. This has proved to be one of the most useful parts of the survey, and has helped staff assess their courses. The main points reported were:

1. There was a difference in popularity between compulsory and non compulsory subjects, which was not unexpected. Students choose the two subjects which they

intend to teach so it would be surprising if they did not enjoy them. Professional studies suffers most in this

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comparison and although some worrying allegations were made by a few former students, about one quarter of students expressed real enjoyment and appreciation of the courses as they are.

2. Teaching practice as a compulsory part of the course is well liked and appreciated but 10% of students feel aggrieved about things that have gone wrong for them. Could GTC do any better for future students?

3. There is cause for concern about English and the way it is taught at Goroka Teachers College. This probably stems from the nature and state of completion of the national syllabus which the Language Studies Department has to train its students to teach. Since this comment was first made there have been changes both in the National and GTC syllabi.

4. There is in many subjects a dichotomy between theoretical knowledge (content) and practical ability (method). More thoughtful new teachers seem to be crying out for more theory so that they can teach higher grades whilst other new teachers wish that they had mastered specific techniques whilst at Goroka Teachers College. GTC must continue to strive to find a balance between content and method.

5. Palmer (1985b) showed that Preliminary Year Students when they choose subjects, opt for one core and one non-core subject seeming to hedge their bets, whilst Direct Entry students frequently choose two core subjects.

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6. Palmer (1985b) also showed that when the new teacher's choices of subject were analysed by the regions of origin of the teachers, there was a tendency for highland students to opt for science, mathematics & commerce. It is suggested that these subjects have the highest value to students if they were to leave teaching and are thus "sensible choices".

Which now teachers chose which schools and why

Very roughly the research indicated that the new teachers could be divided into three groups those who said they obtained their first choice of school 33.7%, those who were satisfied with the school they actually obtained, and those who had problems in obtaining their first teaching post (29.8%). Problems varied widely, but not obtaining one of the top choices they had made and not receiving travel warrants were frequent ones (Palmer, 1985a). Because of the small numbers in the survey (77 teachers), it was not possible to do much analysis by province and most analysis was by region of origin. There seemed to be considerable movement within regions, with new teachers choosing provinces other than their own home province but within their own region. There was much less movement between regions except that about half the male highlanders found posts outside their own regions. These highlanders filled in the gaps where other areas were not producing enough secondary teachers.

Why did teachers make these choices? This was not always clear but a wide variety of reasons were given including “no particular reason”. New Teachers either wanted to be close to people they know or alternatively get right away from “wantoks”, and these were seen as the main motivations for the new teachers’ choice of schools.

It should also be stated that many new teachers were quite fatalistic about the school they went to and felt they would be equally happy anywhere.

Contact between new teacher and school: induction

This was an area where there could be much improvement. Only about one third of new teachers had had any contact with the school before the start of the first term.

Formal induction programmes for new teachers organised by the schools, the inspectors, or the provincial education authorities are largely non-existent.

Subjects taught by the new teachers in schools

Evidence by Palmer (1985b) indicated that schools firstly filled up core subject periods and then non-core subjects. New teachers taught an average of 30 lessons per week and if teachers trained in two subjects are used it would be expected with equal distribution that they would teach 15 lessons of each subject where they teach more than this it could indicate that the subject specialty is in short supply: where they teach less than this there may be an over supply of teachers of the subject. Using this criterion, Agriculture and English teachers seemed in short supply whilst Expressive Arts and Home Economics seemed in surplus. Other evidence which considers the number of new teachers untrained in a subject who are actually used to teach the subject, also indicates that in 1983 Agriculture teachers were in short supply. The situation was so bad that two of the new teachers surveyed, graduates of disciplines other than Agriculture, were used to teach Agriculture full time.

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The teaching load of new teachers is high (30 lessons per week which is a normal load for most teachers) and although it is suggested that new teachers teach grades 7 and 8 only, 34% of them taught above this level. It is, however, teaching a subject for which they have not been trained that is the major worry of new teachers: 30% of new teachers surveyed were concerned about this. It was found that nearly one third of new teachers averaged 32% of their time teaching a subject in which they were not trained. This is bad both for the new teachers and for their students. Headmasters, in cooperation with others concerned should make a real effort to recruit teachers of the subjects which they need most.

This survey indicates that new teachers leave GTC as keen young teachers (86% with favourable attitudes towards teaching). Rowe (1983) indicates because of the impossibly high expectations some inspectors have of them that many new teachers become despondent and disillusioned. What can be done?

Conclusion

The major improvements that could be carried out are to:

- 1) Make teacher induction a reality In the first year of teaching (There are many UK schemes for this Baker, 1978).
- 2) Perhaps lower teaching load in first year of teaching to ensure adequate induction programmes.
- 3) Improve contact between the schools and the new teachers before their first posting.
- 4) Ensure that new teachers teach the subjects for which they have been trained.
- 5) Link Initial training, induction and inservice of all teachers to ensure a continuum of professional development.

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